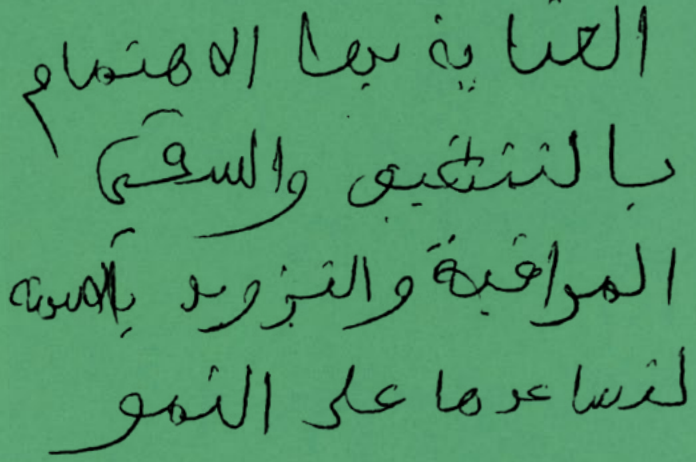
Pas pète foi: Readings and conversation on friendship, labour, failure, faith… and sitting with the mess of it all. Lorén Elhili with Nouha Ben Yebdri, Alia Belgsir, Francesca Masoero, Rim Mejdi, and Sarah Mounia Kachiri

Free notes on communities and gardens. Rim Mejdi



Booklet 2 in the series **Carrots die everywhere: Publishing practices from the Shadow of the Moon**

***Carrots die everywhere: Publishing practices from the Shadow of the Moon** was initiated through the **Shadow of the Moon** project.

Initiated in 2023, the **Shadow of the Moon** drew artists and organisers from different contexts and cultures into a process of exploratory collective research, with a focus on community work, collective imagining, and sustaining social practice. Expanding the sharing practice of the original ensemble, three reading and discussion groups were hosted in late 2024, towards a publication series.

This booklet shares an edited version of the conversation with **Nouha Ben Yebdri**, **Alia Belgsir**, **Francesca Masoero**, **Rim Mejdi**, and **Sarah Mounia Kachiri** hosted by **Lorén Elhili** at the **Dar Bellarj Foundation** in Marrakech, 2024, as well as a short essay by **Rim Mejdi**, 2025.

Pas pète foi: Readings and conversation on friendship, labour, failure, faith... and sitting with the mess of it all.[1]

Amongst the visibly spirited commitment from the six of us who gathered in Marrakech for the conversation that follows, the immediate sense I had was of layers of fatigue fluctuating amongst hopeful and uncertain energy.

Fatigue, burnout, questioning

Movement, space, pauses, devotion

Unfolding between us all is a common need for collective attention to the crises affecting self-organised modes of cultural production — specifically those that centre communities and social space and that work across many lines of refusal, opacity, and fugitivity.[2]

Have these tough conditions ever not been the case?

Can this work be done with ease?

Reclaiming constraints

It is important that we archive our conditions, our efforts, our work.[3]

Refusal

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1. The phrase 'pas pète foi' is literally translated from French to English as 'Don't be afraid' but is used colloquially in Martinique to say 'Don't lose your faith'. An anecdote about the phrase is given by Alia Belgsir towards the end of the conversation.

2. Fred Moten speaks about fugitivity as a continual, improvisational practice — seeking freedom outside of and despite oppressive systems. In *Black and Blur,* he describes fugitivity as a refusal of both the constraints of institutional recognition and the impositions of an oppressive state, while also cultivating alternative ways of being and creating.

3. Poet, playwright, political activist, and essayist lisa minerva luxx, in a workshop that we organised last year, told us that we have to find imaginative ways to archive our work — away from the ephemerality of online platforms and towards forms that can advocate 'minoritarian' causes. Minoritarian is a term coined by Giles Deleuze and expanded upon by the late great José Esteban Muñoz, who worked with the term to explore politics beyond traditional frameworks — emphasising that minoritarian politics involve shifting from mere resistance to a stance of refusal toward dominant power structures.

Cartographies of care

Gardens whose roots are connected across borders, oceans, and time

Mapping our discussions to questions of love, care, emotional labour, friendship, and support structures — as well as failure, queering failure, and faith — is a way of feeling into some of the contexts shaping or constraining us.

Different timelines, different contexts, different spaces, dancing together

With each other in common, as comrades to learn from and with, the carrots, the tomatoes, the medicinal herbs, all of the planting practices, might also benefit from survival.

Invited by the Shadow of the Moon project to host a conversation towards a contribution for this publication series, I chose readings that I identified as troubling well our shared conditions. In this written contribution, the passages of these texts sit in 'living' dialogue with an edited transcript of our conversation.[4]

Un-making Unworlding

Many perform what Jack Halberstam would call "unworlding", a way of thinking — about how to un-make the mess that we've constructed — that says only when we take apart these given conditions do new ways become visible.

The Marrakech reading group comprised Rim Mejdi, Francesca Masoero, Sarah Mounia Kachiri, Alia Belgsir, Nouha Ben Yebdri, and myself.

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4. Alexis Pauline Gumbs and adrienne maree brown both speak to the power of citation practices that do more than reference. In their work, referencing and naming cultural ancestors as well as studying their actions and practices of community become a living dialogue with the lifeworks of Black women, ensuring that their contributions are recognised, respected, and perpetuated within academic, cultural, and activist circles. Within this transmission of our dialogue, there is an intention to perform that same honouring and amplifying of the ideas shaping the practices of everyone in our group.

Everyone in this group plays a pivotal role in the creation of sustaining a 'critical' arts ecology in Morocco, a place where cultural infrastructure is either lacking, is funded by neocolonial agendas, or where the dominant modes available for presenting culture end up flattening the work in service of capitalist agendas.

Those operating on its peripheries are thus engaged in a committed struggle. All focus on questioning how immediate communities can benefit from the resources we have access to through cultural funding. All question how to reclaim common space. All hold a practice around how to dream outside of the given unbreathable structures. All perform, to return to the helpful containers of those words, 'unworlding', in 'fugitivity', and in a practice of 'hope'.[5]

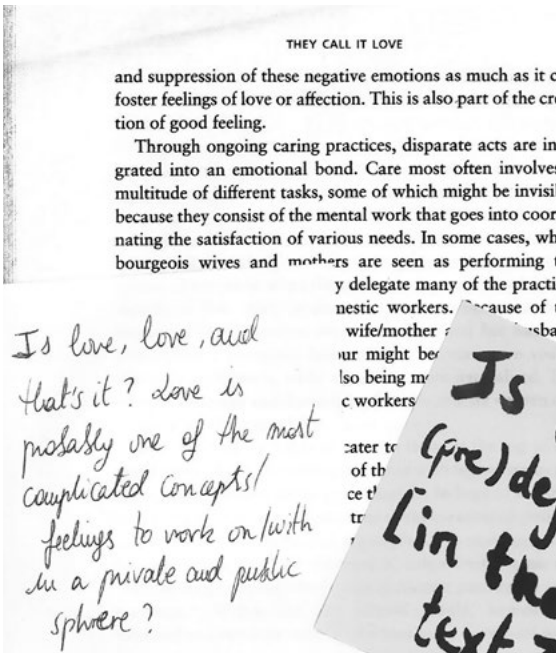
Redistributive practices (from the 'Carrots die everywhere' proposal by Shadow of the Moon)

—Lorén Elhili

5. Mariame Kaba emphasises that "hope is a discipline", requiring consistent, intentional practice rather than being a passive emotion — a deliberate practice of believing in the potential for transformation and change, even amidst challenges. Kaba articulates this idea across her writing, interviews, and public talks. See, for instance, Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (2021) as well as the project and podcast *1 Million Experiments*, which Kaba co-created.

Invisible economies of care

Alva Gotby, *They Call It Love*, 2023. Pages 8-9.


THEY CALL IT LOVE
and suppression of these negative emotions as much as it c
foster feelings of love or affection. This is also part of the cr
tion of good feeling.
Through ongoing caring practices, disparate acts are in
grated into an emotional bond. Care most often involve
multitude of different tasks, some of which might be invisi
because they consist of the mental work that goes into coor
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[fig.1. 'Is love, love, and that's it?', notes from the reading group, 2024]

Emotional hierarchy

Post- privatisation of love

Curating as caring

Romanticised labour

Motherhood with a capital M

The schizophrenia of love (here)

Are we all confused about what is love and what is labour?

They Call It Love attempts to unpack how deeply entwined love is within our economic structures through its privatisation. 'Love', and Gotby's interrogation of the concept, didn't make the same sense to all of us; it wasn't an easy read to pick apart.

We touched on the necessity of recon-textualising theories like this within our specific cultural and historical framework. The emotional labour of cultural/social work was raised by most of us alongside the acknowledgement that mostly feminine bodies perform this work defined under its umbrella. There was a general feeling that the labour of care needs to be made more visible, and valued, across both domestic and professional spheres (this was noted as especially relatable within our field of work).

How can we begin to explicitly name the practices of care bound to our organising?

How are these measured, valued?

Gotby herself speaks about the transformative potential of reclaiming care as a collective rather than privatised act. I wonder if we recognised that enough in our conversation, or acknowledged how the work of cultural organising attempts to achieve this. Can love or care — whether in friendships, organising work, or cultural spaces — be reimagined outside of capitalist logic?

Reclaiming care as a collective act

Ideology depends on such emotional investment — is not just a mental belief, but a way of feeling and relating to the world. Ideology would not stick without feeling. To some degree, ideology is feeling.

—Gotby, 2023, p. 8-9.

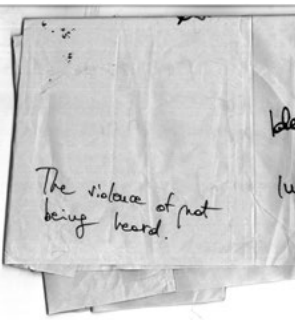
'Ideology is *feeling'*

RM: Most of the time, ideology is thoughts, propaganda, but when I was reading this, I agreed that it is also feelings. When you talk to some people, they are brainwashed. They are heart-washed. It is really beyond believing in the ideology. It is like feeling. That is the reality. That is the truth. You cannot say anything else.

[fig.2. 'heart washed', note from the reading group, 2024]

Through ongoing caring practices, disparate acts are integrated into an emotional bond. Care most often involves a multitude of different tasks, some of which might be invisible because they consist of the mental work that goes into coordinating satisfaction of various needs.

—Gotby, 2023, p. 8-9.



[fig.3. 'the violence of not being heard', note from the reading group, 2024]

RM: Women, especially housewives, not only have to cater to everyone's emotional needs, but their own emotional needs are not met most of the time. I don't think we measure the violence of not being heard.

SK: I was thinking of my aunt… She gives her whole time to her husband and sons. She knows how to meet others' needs, but she doesn't know how to meet her own.

Being a host, organising, feels like motherhood. The load of organising is, like, the same as organising a family gathering. To host, you have to see, to understand how to look. As Maha always said, "*learning how to look.*"[6] You have to accept the load, and accept, to understand how to see, to then take responsibility also, to be a host.

I'm not a mother, but I feel it's something like motherhood. It's linked for me. It's not just something anyone can do.

6. Maha Elmadi is the director of Dar Bellarj, and a very important example of someone in our community who works tirelessly to support marginalised groups who live and work in the neighbourhood of the foundation, creating spaces of possibility and joy and self empowerment. The reading group was held at Dar Bellarj and I think the foundations of many of our practices are informed or inspired by Maha and what she has built.

FM: Women are expected to contribute more to the emotional well-being of others as well as the family bond itself — this resonates so deeply.

NBY: I just get stuck somehow in this idea of labour and love. I'm not sure if we are still talking about the same thing. Is it 'labour of love'? Or labour and love? Or love as a labour?

Emotional reproduction is also the reproduction of social hierarchy, where those who are already comfortable have their needs met to a much greater extent than those at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

— Gotby, 2023, p. 8

FM: In our scene, curators and organisers are mostly women. Things are changing, but the weight of emotional labour still falls on them. An art critic once described Jeanne's practice as "serving tea and biscuits to friends." This is such a gendered remark, but it reflects the kind of work we do.

Serving tea and biscuits to your friends (this anecdote repeats in CDE booklets 1 & 4)

Through the privatisation of emotional reproduction, bad feeling becomes individualised. Emotional reproduction serves to smooth over malcontent with the dominant order, creating a belief that we can and should have satisfying emotional lives under capitalism.

Emotional reproduction naturalises the world as it is and makes it appear as a desirable state of things — as long as we make the right choices and behave in the right way. If we are unhappy, we just need to manage our feelings better.

The ideology of romance tells us we could be happy if we could just find true love. Under capitalism, love is a highly privatised resource.

— Gotby, 2023, p. 9

RM: I don't agree that much. She speaks about privatising, how love is privatised now under capitalism. I think we're beyond, post-privatisation!

NBY: I first understood the idea of privatising love as a way of monetising love, but then I understood it as a way of making the idea of love, or loving, a more private practice. It wasn't at all the idea of love I had in mind. It quickly moved to an extreme of how we can address love.

AB: In Moroccan culture, caring extends beyond the privatised sphere. It's a deep behaviour — caring for anyone who needs it.

LE: It's not lost on me that the Latin root of 'curate' is to care. Back then, they cared for objects; now we are caring for the human or the more-than-human.

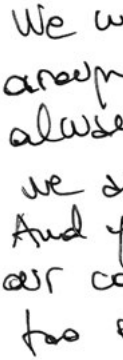
Context and specificity

AB: Love as a concept changes radically depending on context. In Morocco, we don't talk about love — it's not something you can sell or use as a market. Just think of the scandal of Merendina and their Valentine's campaign last year.[7] They tried to use it as a market, but people everywhere wanted to take it off [the shelves]. So they had to reinvent what it means, extending it to family and friends instead. That's where the concept of 'caring' came into play.

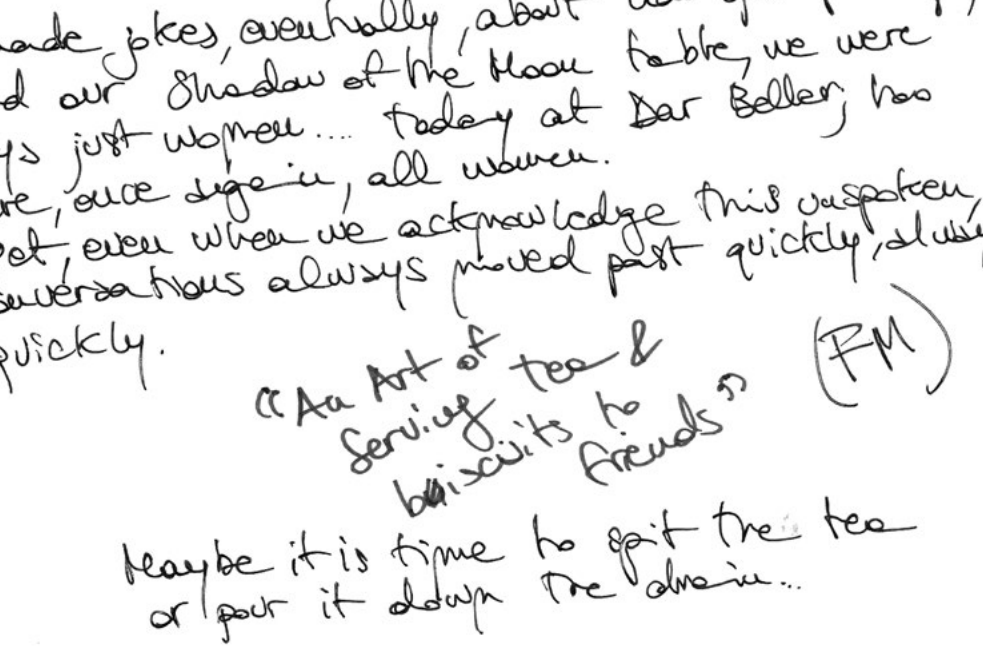
So, I think, again, that the appreciation of all of this text and all of these ideas

would always need, in our case, to be recontextualised in the Moroccan context, if we need to speak about what we are doing here, particularly because then we are dealing with a whole other very schizophrenic type of logic.

You can't truly understand the role of women in Moroccan society, for example, without a deep decentralisation of your perspective, without expecting her to align with any Western values. It's about letting go of preconceived notions and recognising that her place is shaped by a completely different set of cultural, social, and historical forces. Expecting her role to mirror what you might see in Western societies only limits your understanding of the complex, nuanced reality she navigates.



7. In February 2022, a popular chocolate snack in Morocco, Merendina branded their packaging with messages of romantic love such as "Kan Bghik" and "Mankdarch nsak" ("I love you" and "I can't forget you"). There was outrage across Morocco — local authorities asked retailers to repackage or return goods; retailers and consumers alike called for boycotts of the product. The controversy stems from love still being a taboo subject in Morocco, though many young people rallied in support of the snack's messaging and saw the controversy as raising an important dialogue around the need for a shift in how romantic love is handled within the public sphere. *Merendina: Analyse d'un bad buzz inattendu,* 2022.


ade jokes, eventually, about how unsurprisingly
d our Shadow of the Moon tables, we were
s just women.... Today at Dar Baller, how
re, once again, all women.
ot, even when we acknowledge this unspoken,
versations always moved past quickly, almost
quickly.
"An Art of tea & serving biscuits to friends" (FM)
Maybe it is time to spit the tea
or pour it down the drain...

[fig.4. 'spit the tea, or pour it down the drain...', note from the reading group, 2024]

Friendship as support structure and survival, or friendship as a site of failure

The Company We Keep: A Conversation with Céline Condorelli and Avery Gordon, 2013. Pages 2-3.

Céline Condorelli and Avery Gordon discuss friendship not just as a personal bond, but as a structural force that carries both transformative potential and contradiction. They asks us to consider whose relationships are considered politically and intellectually significant.

Intergenerational, intercultural connectivities

We touched on the intergenerational, intercultural friendships that spaces like Dar Bellarj — with their focus on the Gifted Mothers, children, and youth groups

Collective struggles and commons-based movements are referenced in the text as being sites where friendship has held multiple functions for strategies of survival, resistance, and world-making. This is where I think our conversation landed most — grappling with the sense of danger that those kinds of working friendships face. We explored redefining the concept of friendship — shared personal concerns, failures, and heartbreak — and didn't resolve the question of how to balance friendship within work.

Friendship as both essential and precarious

Friendship as a practice

Friendship sustains our organising work, yet it is also shaped by exhaustion and the pressure of productivity. Friendship cannot remain an abstract ideal. Just like love, as explored by bell hooks, we have to think about it as a practice — one that requires maintenance… solidarity?

Can we work without friendship?

Should we?

Avery: You have been thinking about friendship quite a bit and you've written at least two texts about it [...] Why?

Friendship as 'support in practice'

Céline: As you know, I've had a long-term interest in support and support structures. I believe friendship to be one of the most fundamental forms of support in practice. The primary motivation for writing the text you mentioned was to start to directly explore the idea of friendship. [...] I started by looking at how it appeared in philosophical discourse, and immediately I encountered two hurdles: first, no women philosophers have ever written about friendship — which is still unbelievable to me. And second, all these beautiful philosophical texts written by men explicitly exclude women and slaves from the realm of friendship.

—Condorelli & Gordon, 2013

female friendship

RM: When the Greek philosophers spoke and thought about friendship, they called it *philia*, and you know, it's a very specific kind of love. They made it look very prestigious and noble. But when we think socially in a very superficial way about female friendship, it's like women having tea and eating biscuits and talking about each other and 'spitting the tea'.

That's what they say, right? So the way it's seen is really like, men, when they're friends, they speak about interesting things and profound things, but women, they just speak about each other. Because men, when they have, *une correspondance*...

AB: *Un pistolet*.

RM: It's like *un pistolet*… Wow. That's true. They always phrase it in a very fancy way.

Friendship as a modality of social change

I had an intuition that it's exactly amongst the excluded that more interesting models of friendship in practice can be found. Looking for women's friendships, for instance, I found them among the suffragettes, and I also looked for models for friendship in my work on the Commons. In both these cases, friendship works as a modality of social change, which can produce other forms of doing things, and these are more than just about work.

The suffragettes were or became friends in their struggle to change women's conditions, which is something we could call work, but also, and mostly, this was about how they wanted to live, and how they wanted other women to be able to live.

— Condorelli & Gordon, 2013

RM: I think it's a matter of not just saying or believing in solidarity, but of holding a set of beliefs and practices. When you say, 'It's very hard to work with women' — some women think that power dynamics between women are difficult to handle. I think that thinking this, perpetuating this idea, is really horrible. I thought about the myth that women can't be friends because they have too many 'conflicts of interest'.

I know some women that really believe in that — that women are not faithful in friendship, and they only bring headaches.

Even a lot of men think that women can't really be friends. Of course, it's a patriarchal construction, but I was wondering how it was built, and why so many people believe that?

Céline: I have been thinking about friendship on two levels that I'm not sure can be entirely reconciled. One level of it is as a way of associating yourself with other people. The reason why we are sitting together talking is also because we are friends, and we are working together at the same time. Another level has to do with friendship as a way of associating yourself with ideas of befriending issues.

— Condorelli & Gordon, 2013

AB: We are speaking about time, and how we give time to each other, and how to place that. It's quite interesting when you start to understand the limits of each other and the skills also. I won't ask you to do something if you are not able to...

Risk (friendship as powerful and dangerous)

Can we work without it?

FM: I guess for a long time, I've been thinking of the way in which we have grown into friendships, and with friendships. But then, I think I'm in a moment of deep... I don't know if it's disenchantment; I'm also a bit tired. There is a lot of pain, I think, and a sense that this is somewhat of a failure, my failure, but also other people's failure, in the sense that... I actually started putting some random words down on the paper, and I was thinking how powerful friendship is, but also how very dangerous it is. I've started thinking about how can we work without it. Can we work without it?

I'm talking personally, the sense of failure in getting away from this circle of production and consumption of projects, and work, work, work, that we camouflage with this sense of 'Ah, but we are doing something different than the system of general production', but actually, we're not.

Nobody is getting a safe passage

Ruangrupa, one of their slogans at Documenta was "make friends not art" and even then, everybody ended up in complete burnout. So nobody is getting a safe passage anywhere, actually, with this positioning of ourselves in a different space, using the idea of friendship as a category of belonging, in a way.[8]

Positioning ourselves in a different space

LE: I feel that on a really personal level. When I hear you ask, "Can you work without friendship?" I think, what a shame that someone could lose their relationality to people, to communities, because of the way that the system doesn't resource you enough — to not fail the project, or to keep the commitment to the friends that are involved in the project.

Céline: What Hannah Arendt called "this thinking business" (her description of the work that she and Mary McRorty did individually and in relation to each other), is done from a position of closeness [...] there is intimacy in relationship to people, and also in relation to issues that I would call friendship.

8. Documenta is an exhibition of contemporary art which takes place in Kassel, Germany every five years. Documenta 15, organised by the collective Ruangrupa, took place in 2022 and LE18, which some of the group operates within, participated in this past edition.

What ideas, issues, and people do we want to spend our time with? [She holds up a book] Why did you bring this book to our conversation?

— Condorelli & Gordon, 2013

FM: In our case, we all first met as colleagues, and then we're inhabiting a specific field, that in many ways, allows us to feel we are creating something that is not just a professional relationship. Because of many different factors, we end up building friendships too.

LE: You begin learning about the person that you're building something with, and you grow love for them, and you then build a friendship, and you want to keep working together.

Friendship is overrated

NB: I wanted to challenge the text in a more radical way: in the sense of, well, what if friendship as a concept is actually overrated? We often say, "This is my friend" or, "These are my school friends" or, "This is my friend's neighbour..." But what does it really mean?

What if we only had two categories of relationships: family and lovers? In both cases, love is present. What changes is how you give it, how much, in what form, and in what context. Maybe the real difference is that you don't choose your family, but you do choose your lovers. And friends? Sometimes they become lovers. Sometimes they disappear. Sometimes they become so close and present in your daily life that they feel like family.

So what if we just focused on those two categories, family and lovers, and tried to understand relationships through the amount of love, care, or attention we give? Not to box people in, but to pay attention to the quality and depth of the connection.

Lovers, family

Another aspect that was important to me was to address friendship in action, to think about it as a practice. The philosophical tradition demands defining what friendship is in theoretical or abstract terms, but I was interested in how to be and work in friendship in inhabiting it as a condition.

— Condorelli & Gordon, 2013

Inhabiting friendship as a condition

AB: What we call 'the philosophers' in the classical philosophy of today, were only males, all together, speaking about their vision. We don't have any philosophical practice, or practical text, to speak about what is left of our tradition. It comes just, for example, with some... How do you call it? *Les proverbes*. So many proverbs. It's super important to come back to the practice, the practice in the friendship.

Practice of friendship

RM: I also thought about the politics of friendship, or how friendship can transcend social class, ethnic differences, and religious differences. More so than love, I think. Because love has this very, again, exclusive or profitable aspect of it, you know? But friendship normally should not have this. And I think somehow it's more spiritual. When you love your friend, really love your friend, you're not expecting anything. That makes it, not easier, but somehow, I don't know, more noble.

Transcendence and expectations

SM: I also feel like I never wanted to work if there is no kind of friendship or love. It's also a choice that our work allows us to have this deeper connection with the issues that we're working on, and with the people. But then it also changes how we work, the limitations of the work, and what we are allowing in the act of labour. I feel like, because we're friends, I can work any hours. But then, there are no sittings anymore. When do we do the friendship, and when do we do work together? It's not the same quality of time. I also feel like, especially in this region, we have to create our own opportunity, and our own support system. And then creating work opportunities with our friends is also keeping us together and keeping us in the same place.

Support systems

LE: I resonate with what Sarah said. I can only imagine working in friendship. When I begin working with people, I try to imagine them as friends. For me, that's really important, how these people will be a mode of survival for me, somehow, at some point, me for them. And that translating into what we put out into the world, and being a support structure. And actually, again, to go back to the Alva Gotby text, I think that's also what she starts to get at. Instead of thinking of the heterosexual relationship as the support structure, how can our friends be the support structure? How can we think more radically about how we build those up and practise them?

Survival

AB: For me, it's quite interesting what has been said about the separation between family and lovers in general.

I would place you in my family more than my friends and lovers. Then I think about this idea of being born in a family — existing, in the case of our projects, altogether, in a context with other members who are already there. I came, for example, to Marrakech to create this baby project. And I have already older sisters, aunts, and other parts of the family; they are are not exactly 'chosen people', but my feeling towards them is built on the same type of respect and care.

A family of projects (older sisters, the baby)

I'm also speaking about this family-related thing because it offers an intergenerational logic that maybe we don't have with friendship, and it also forces us, in a way, to find a way to learn from each other's experiences.

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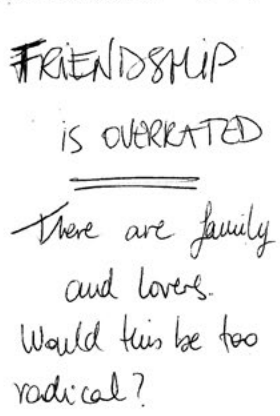

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[fig.5. 'friendship is overrated', note from the reading group, 2024]

Failure as refusal

Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2011. Pages 88-89.

I love the thinking that this text led us into, how it held us and produced ideas between us all. I sensed a relief in some of us, or maybe a sense of being seen by the idea of failure becoming a non-conforming type of world-building, or an alternative way of existing and practicing. We spoke about the fact that some projects may not be recognised in institutional terms but may still create immeasurable moments of exchange and meaning.

Failure as seeds being sown

Experimentation with our failures was raised alongside a critique of common sense and its place in maintaining fascist agendas. The state's tactic of making resistance feel like failure was discussed, and how we as organisers may be made to feel our work is ineffective, feeding into apathy. For some of us, failure was still hard to accept when it is also political failure.

Archives and their place in capturing failures

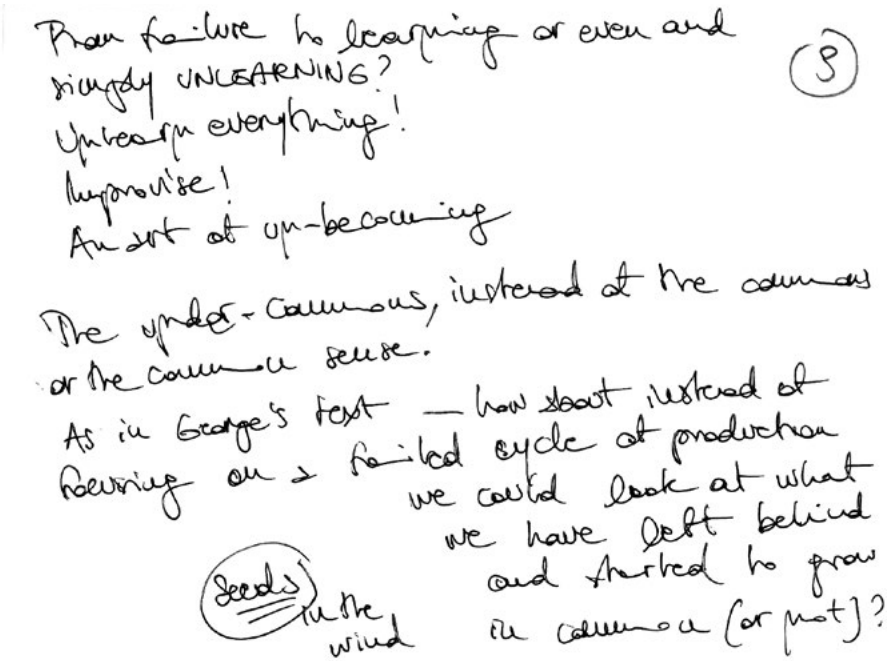
Popular archives (counter to state failures of holding accountability)

Heteronormative common sense leads to the equation of success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope. Other subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes of common sense lead to the association of failure with nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, non-reproductive lifestyles, negativity, and critique.

— Halberstam, 2011

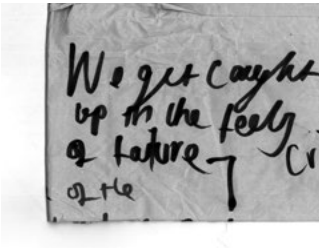
NB: I think it could be interesting to consciously embrace failure. Almost take it on, personally, as a kind of mantra. Maybe failure isn't that bad. What if we started a process with that idea in mind? And then, pushed it to the edge, seeing failure not just as a mistake or collapse, but almost like a 'big bang', something that could lead to a whole range of new or unexpected things.

FM: I co-wrote an article with George [Bajalia], a sort of reflecting back about QANAT.


From failure to learning or even and
strongly UNLEARNING?
Unlearn everything!
Improvise!
An art of un-becoming
(8)
The under-commons, instead of the commons
or the common sense.
As in George's text — how about instead of
focusing on a failed cycle of production
we could look at what
we have left behind
and started to grow
in commons (or not)?
Seeds in the wind

[fig.6. 'failure…unlearning… seeds in the wind', note from the reading group, 2024]

There is a passage he wrote, I think it's so simple, and yet it is so important… He pointed out how we often got caught in this feeling of having failed the project, the goals that you have set up, ambitiously. But what we don't see, what we miss, is all those seeds that have casually fallen on the ground while doing whatever we did, and what is actually growing out of those, you know, which is quite beautiful.



[fig.7. 'we get caught in the feeling of failure', note from the reading group, 2024]

AB: In our case, if we have to come back to our common situation, which is cultural organising, if I can label it this this way, it's quite interesting to reflect on when you think a project is a success, when do you feel that you get to the point? Is it by the people that you manage to touch, or is there none?

When is a project a success in cultural organising?

This leads me to think about this conversation and what we were speaking about a bit before, about family, which reminded me of the context of the queer community. We just had an event that gathered a lot of the queer community, in Morocco this past weekend, and we discussed this — projects that failed, in a way, and how this is also linked to, yes, the whole system that is making it not easy, but also how, at the end, friendship — all of us together and in our dynamics, can actually be the reason for [failure].

There were a lot of associations that really fought, and had a real impact, but they couldn't keep working together because they were the exes of each other. Even at this event, a lot of people couldn't come because they have exes there.

Everyone is an ex

At that time, I really thought that it's interesting to think of people more like families — we can argue, but in the end, we are still all here, we're still together.

Common sense, dominant and subordinate improvisation

In his refusal of economic determinism Gramsci writes, "Mechanical historical materialism does not allow for the possibility of error, but assumes that every political act is determined, immediately, by the structure, and therefore as a real and permanent (in the sense of achieved) modification of the structure" (2000: 191). For Gramsci, ideology has as much to do with error or failure as with perfect predictability. Therefore, a radical political response would have to deploy an improvisational mode to keep pace with the constantly shifting relations between dominant and subordinate, within the chaotic flow of political life. Gramsci views the intellectual function as a mode of self-awareness and an applied knowledge of the structures that constrain meaning to the demands of a class-bound understanding of common sense. Queer studies offer us one method for imagining not some fantasy of an elsewhere, but existing alternatives to hegemonic systems.

— Halberstam, 2011, p. 89

FM: They go on by talking about the unbecoming, or maybe it's about this, again, very overused word of 'unlearning'. If you want to try to go more in the subversive sphere, or this idea of improvising, or maybe getting crazy, completely blowing up some type of structure… I guess I reconnect this back with this part of Gramsci that criticises the notion of common sense.

To me, it's very interesting because, also in relationship to the abuse of looking at the commons, or of this idea of commoning, or, even popular wisdom, et cetera. Sometimes it's not necessarily interesting. I mean, Gramsci wrote from prison during fascism, so to me, common sense was what had allowed fascism to come.

RM: Common sense is dangerous; it's very dangerous. Common sense, even in minority groups... That scares me sometimes, because minority groups are like closed groups or like-minded people; they can easily build this kind of myth of being right, of having been in the sight of the great good, because they're resisting a powerful establishment, but even that is stupid.

Being 'right' in a closed, like-minded group

SM: It's exclusive, so that means that there is only one way. It's very binary. There is no place for the plurality of the thinking and of the people. Also, even if you have the same issues in common, but we differ on the way we approach the issue… If we differ, then we separate, because we have to have this common sense that is the only way of being in society.

There's only one way (recurs in booklet 4)

Failure can be counted within that set of oppositional tools that James C. Scott called "the weapons of the weak" [...] Some scholars, such as Saidiya Hartman, have used Scott's work to describe subtle resistances to slavery, like working slowly or feigning incompetence. [...] We can also recognise failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique.

Failure as a tool

As a practice, failure recognises that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities.

— Halberstam, 2011

NB: But usually failure is also... You fail in accordance to a system, an idea, the way of doing. Sometimes you fail to your own expectations.

The experience of failure when you don't want to fail

Political failure

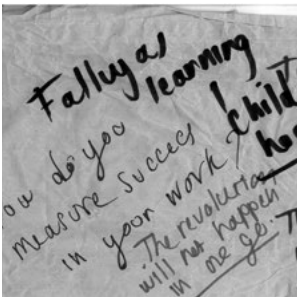
RM: Later, they say failure is a utopian "rejection of pragmatism". When you do it in that perspective, as a choice to resist an establishment, that's amazing, but imagine, you don't want to fail. You want to make something happen, you want to succeed, and you can't. It's very hard. I can't find the emotional distance in accepting failure, to be honest. If we talk about the system, and you're facing a system that is rigged and corrupted, and, not just you, but a whole bunch of people are prevented from creating stuff or doing stuff that is meaningful. And at the same time, it's a political failure rather than a personal one...

"Many small changes, rhizomatically" (FM in CDE booklet 1)

FM: I think we need to free ourselves from the idea that the revolution can be one goal. That's not how the world functions. I think that's also the problem, when it comes to the political level, and I'm a bit generic here, but I think the system keeps making us feel we're constantly failing.

LE: This thing that our parents tell us, like, 'Oh, you fell, don't worry, you'll learn'...

I believe that is, again, connected to the state; you learn. But maybe, with Halberstam's idea of failure, it's that you do learn; the hurt is something that we then subvert and use against the system. I think this refusal of legibility and the focus on peasant communities that moved slowly through their labour in resistance to the system… It's like you're building a different system because of the things that you keep learning from, from your failings.



[fig.8. 'falling as learning', note from the reading group, 2024]

As Sandage narrates in his compelling study, losers leave no records, while winners cannot stop talking about it, and so the record of failure is "a hidden history of pessimism in a culture of optimism". This hidden history of pessimism, a history moreover that lies quietly behind every story of success, can be told in a number of different ways; while Sandage tells it as a shadow of U.S capitalism, I tell it here as a tale of anticapitalist, queer struggle. I tell it also as a narrative about anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, and an art of unbecoming.

— Halberstam (quoting Scott Sandage), 2011

Hidden histories

RM: That idea of "losers leave no records" takes me back to our work in archives and how archives, from the beginning of the system, express what happened and where it happened and, you know, history and official historiographies… It's really interesting to create other archives, unofficial archives and popular archives, that can not only tell our history and our stories from another point of view, but also tell the stories of unfinished

Unfinished archives

things, of unfinished projects, unfinished stories, and unsuccessful events.

Question of affording failure ("communities who can't be failed... who are failed all the time") (JvH in CDE booklets 1 & 4)

LE: Francesca, you said something earlier about who can afford to fail. And when you're working with communities, or when you're working with un-archiving a context like Moroccan history, political history, colonial history, the failure feels bigger because you feel like you're failing a whole, like, invisibilised context.

Claiming the void

RM: Exactly. Sorry, but I'm really going to talk about it because this pisses me off... We spoke about political history and, for example, how the Lead years have been, there's a big gap in archives.[9] Now, there are more films that try to fill the void. What is really sad and even upsetting is how they curate a certain discourse, a certain official discourse, but still claim that they voice the marginalised and the victims' voices… And that's another way the system succeeds to, again, subvert the kind of work we're trying to do.

9. The Years of Lead in Morocco (1960s-1990s) refer to a period of state repression under King Hassan II, characterised by political persecution, exile, and disappearances, imprisonment of dissidents, and heavy restrictions on freedom of expression. There were widespread human rights violations targeting leftist activists and journalists.

Faith, trust, and remembering scale

adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*, 2017. Pages 52-53.

Emergent Strategy is like a manual for social organising anchored in learning from nature's simple but complex patterns. It is, above all, about sustaining movements and practicing small scale efforts that can work toward transformative worlds. Our sighs were audible, and the softening of our spirits too, in reading aloud this page. A soothing and necessary end to our session. We all agreed that we often need a reminder that things don't have to be that deep, that nature has solutions, and that our faith, if practiced, can sustain us.

Faith, hope, or illusion?

There was pleasure taken from the words and, after deconstructing so much constraint, reminders of the spirit of everyone's practices.

I have begun to wonder how it looks to practice complexity as a sacred path, as interdependence. Of course, whenever I think things like this, I turn to Grace Lee Boggs and find that she was there ahead of me — on the wall of her home is a sign: "Organising is to the community what spiritual practice is to the individual." Being a part of movements is complex work, it requires a faith.

— brown, 2017

Complexity as a sacred path

RM: I'm so happy to read this, because sometimes in community we forget that we need faith, whatever faith it is, to be together. It's only faith that is really holding us together. We're not making millions, right?

We're not really changing the world as we want to do it; it's faith that makes us want to be together again and again.

NB: Why not use the word hope?

RM: Because hope can be fulfilled or not fulfilled. But faith doesn't need to be fulfilled. When you have faith, it's there, you know?

Having faith – in the practice and continuing

SM: I feel like faith is also something you choose. You choose to have faith and to keep believing in it. It's more grounded. I have faith, and I choose to have faith and to continue to nourish my faith. I'm still in the practice and continuing.

Putting us back in scale (little humans)

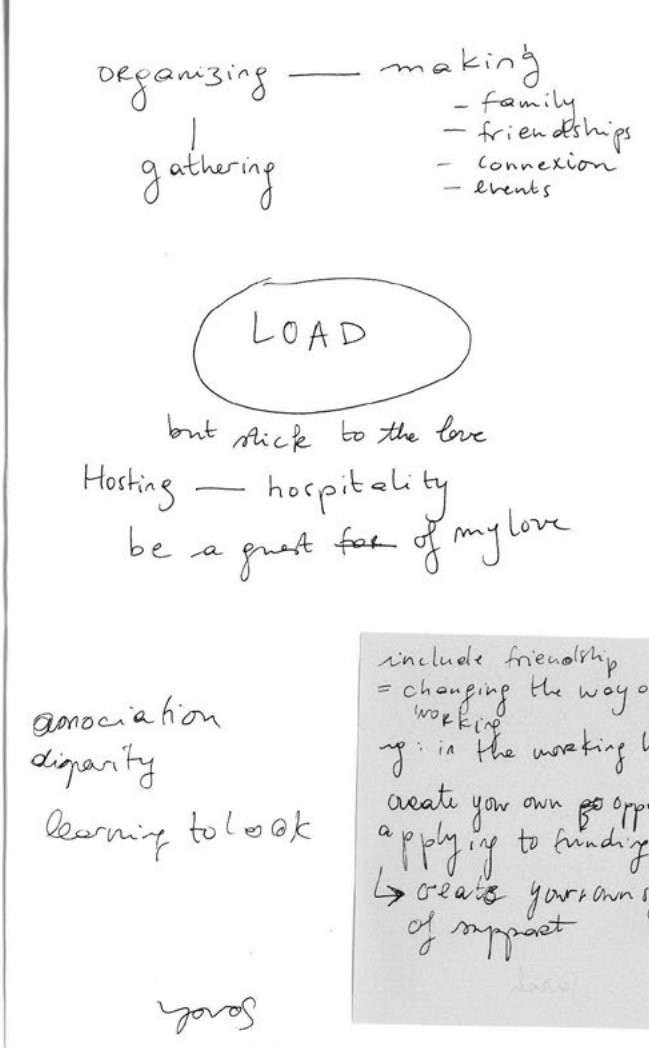
FM: I think it also, whether you are in the spiritual or religious view or not, puts us little humans back into the scale of what we are in a much bigger context, and there are actually also, let's say, solutions. There is so much intelligence already existing, all around us, that can offer ways of operating together visibly.

NB: This idea of scale, of perspective — these are such essential, technical notions: scale, distance, proportion, and yet, we forget them so easily. Being reminded of that in this particular moment has sparked something. It gave me a stronger sense of faith, or maybe hope. It might seem simple, but it carried a sort of relief.

AB: I think it's a perfect way also to close the whole loop of this piling of concepts. When you were speaking about how you're so afraid, or how you hate failure, to come back to that, I wanted to answer, but if you don't lose your faith, you would know that, every time you fail, it's just for a purpose.

Just to be able to do it better the next time. But I didn't say that, because indeed we are all dealing with our faith differently and stuff…

There is a general concept, in Martinique: they have this very specific way to mix French, to use words to get some concepts and to remove others. For example, they don't say, 'I'm afraid'. And to say to someone, 'don't be afraid', they would say, 'pas pète foi', which means, 'don't lose your faith'. But just about this concept, I wanted to say in the same relation to you, *pas pète foi*.



[fig.9. 'association, disparity, learning to look', note from the reading group, 2024]

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Notes

Free notes on communities and gardens

Rim Mejdi, 2025

Introduction & interviews

The following is a free reflection based on personal experience, observation, and interview — an attempt to draw an internal critique and conceptual analysis on the existence and the importance of collectives in our contexts.

Why do we feel the need to be part of a collective (whether as artists, curators, or eco-farmers)? What are our motivations? These thoughts came to me while walking around the 'Roof-top' of Dar Bellarj.

In 2019, Francesca Masoero, with whom I work as a co-curator in the same foundation, along with Maha El Madi (Director and Creator of the Gifted Mothers group), started an eco-edible speculative garden — a collaborative, collective thought and work between QANAT Collective and the Collective Workshops.

This lab garden served as an experimentation ground for growing crops, collecting seeds, and reflecting on the memory of Marrakech as a formal City-Garden through artistic research, while addressing present challenges around hydric and natural resources.

I've been part of this project since its inception. But taking some reflective distance and looking at the results years after, I have been trying to reflect on the process. The need to assess a successful example stemmed from a professional failure that I was trying to understand, deconstructing the paradigm of where we live as artists.

[figs.10-14. All figures show notes from the Shadow of the Moon workshop at Dar Bellarj, 2024, facilitated by ungovernable]

Why didn't the two filmmakers' collectives I initiated take off? Was it a lack in the means of production, or was it our proper impotency as artists to self-organise?

Collective work is a form of political activism. Failing to surpass our individual interests is a reflection of a broader, chaotic political context, where society is divided and individuals are isolated from one another, unable to act with unity and solidarity. Feeling impotent is a distinctive characteristic of feeling isolated, says Hannah Arendt, since power always comes from men acting together, and isolated men (individuals) are, by definition, impotent.[1]

I encountered this freeze-response in peers, friends, and myself in moments of immense pessimism or anger. Resisting it seems unattainable, as if we are bewitched. The spells of political despair and oppression.

But this garden, and the Mother-Goddesses, as I like to call them, created something magical that resists feelings of incapability and social fragmentation.

I asked them some questions about the garden and their work together.

Why did you first join the garden work group?

Zahra Elkhiraoui: My motivation in joining the group stems from my passion for plants and seeds.

Amina Bouyebrine: [My work] starts with a powerful reference to the spiritual value of collective making, stating that "God's hand is with the community". One hand can't do much. Our goal from gardening is remembrance of lost Aarssat (fruit and vegetable gardens within the old walls of the medina), trying to revive 'a lost' oasis. We used to live in a city full of gardens… We believe we can revive greenery at least around

1. Hannah Arendt '*The Human Condition*', 1958.

houses through small gestures of planting roses and cactuses as communal work.

Fatima Ennaaoui: When we joined the Foundation, each one had a purpose, but when we met each other, we created one circle. If one of us is absent, she leaves an empty space.

Latifa Ghazdaoui: I had no relationship with growing crops… It's another new world that we discovered.

Rashida El Idrissi Lahbali: I entered the collective for my passion with agriculture… I used to see my late father working with his own hands, even if he had workers. He encouraged us to work with him, as young as we were… When he died, the door closed on this chapter.

How did the collective work around the garden feel? Did you discover a need that was fulfilled by the community garden involvement?

Zahra El Khiraoui: As a group, we share love and active participation in the workshop's tasks, as well as discussing the garden's issues…

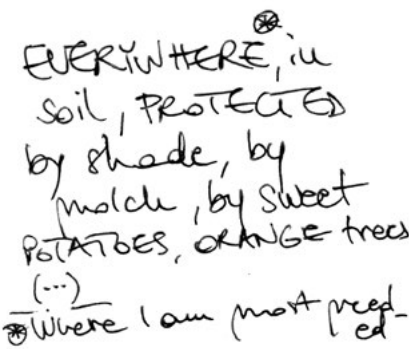
Amina Bouyebrine: We are from dust and to it we return. In our contact with soil, our bodies go through a sensual experience and we regain motivation and strength… When we plant a seed with a pure heart, it grows to a beautiful crop… That's what we try to accomplish.

Fatima Ennaaoui: Each one fulfilled their needs, I fulfilled mine in theater and archiving, that's how I became the group archiver. To preserve our memory and leave a legacy. I didn't know anything about gardening… I discovered that a crop is like a human; it grows in the earth's womb like a baby. We need to protect it and give it care. When it becomes like a teenager, we need to watch over it from bad weeds. When it becomes a fruit, it's a tremendous joy; it's like an adult human needs love and care.

Latifa Ghazdaoui: We feel like we complete each other. We feel solidarity and love. When one is absent, something is missing. We work collectively as one person.

Zahra El Khiraoui: I discovered that I'm drawn to the garden work because of a nostalgia to my relationship with my father and a childhood spent in nature with crops. He used to plant and take care of crops and water the gardens, and I would observe him.

Rashida El Idrissi Lahbali: The collective work revived my passion for plants I thought had died. As soon as we started the workshops, I felt different. The smell and feeling of dust when I touched it with my hands. Remembering my father's will, taking me back in time… It was exhilarating to prepare the space, mount the wooden boxes and fill them with the mixtures of dust and compost, and it was an honor to start the seeding process under professional supervision and learn permaculture.



For me it's not just a hobby; gardening is a passion. Collective work shows efficient results, and it's fundamental in any endeavor, helping the collective to constantly grow and develop.

What future do you envision for the group, yourself, and the garden?

Zahra El Khiraoui: We share emotional bonds that we don't envision separating.

Amina Bouyebrine: We dream of an eco-farm for the mothers to continue planting and experimenting.

Fatima Ennaaoui: I hope the garden gets greener… I see it as a cultural space to hold discussions and talks, a salon to serve tea and sweets.

Latifa Ghazdaoui: I might stay with the collective, but I also think about creating another space, a plant nursery of my own…

Rashida El Idrissi Lahbali: Plants are not merely a nice decoration; they're silent and generous partners, teaching us devotion.

To finish off with a religious parable — as gardening and agriculture are often referenced in the Quran and religious belief is related to agriculture — in a Hadith (Saying) by the prophet: "There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him". And, last but not least, the prayer for planting; "O God, give us crops and turn the udder, water us from the blessings of the sky and give us from the blessings of the earth. O Creator of the heavens and the earth and Mover of clouds and rain. Send down water on us by your mercy, power and generosity".

Signs and miracles

I remembered a verse from the bible:

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all the believers were together and had all things in common; and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.[2]

Searching for examples of communities that flourished spiritually, intellectually, and sustainably, I often arrive at religious communities, born from a common denominator of faith. Read literally or metaphorically, the verse speaks of common spiritual principles, aspirations, and sustenance. I prefer the term community to collective, a community of spirit.

What resulted from this incredible communion?

Signs and miracles.

2. *Acts of the Apostles* 2:43-45.

The verse above summarises the earliest Christian communities in Jerusalem and their daily life. In later centuries, monks and theologians created different orders to emulate them — where prayer, collective work, and one's service to the group served as an ultimate purpose. In the experience of my immediate and bigger artistic scene, collectives I have been a part of are more centred on a common interest — often materialistic or opportunistic. (Finishing a specific project, securing funding, etc. More like what Marx criticised as being an "illusory community of capitalism".)[3] They're more like communities of interest.

In this context, how can we conceive the 'being' dimension?

A profound, personal, existential experience, not as individuals, but as a community?

From cultivating one's garden to cultivating a communal garden (from being to becoming)

In David E. Cooper's *A Philosophy of Gardens*, the author identifies several reasons why gardening is of significance to people.[4] Namely, pride in growing one's own vegetables and consuming or sharing what one has grown, feeling some communion with nature, providing a structure and regularity to one's life, being physically engaged in activities that mediate between the human and non-human worlds, promoting a sense of community with other gardeners and visitors, and the garden being a refuge for the individual and a place for reverie. Cooper continues that garden practices "invite and attract certain virtues by providing especially appropriate opportunities for their exercise".

3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, 1968. The true community of free association is in contrast to the illusory community under capitalism.

4. David E. Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, 2006.

The Gifted Mothers reflect in poetic terms about the plants, not as objects to be cared for, but as generous silent partners with whom they build a reciprocal relationship. The crops teach devotion, Rashida said. Their existence is like ours; they grow like humans and need proper care, responded Fatima. Their responses also emphasised the sensorial relationship with the natural elements, how it evokes their memories but also anchors them in a presence/present of caring, cultivating, awaiting tangible results (signs and miracles).

Gardening becomes a poetic and sensual collective gesture that allows togetherness while creating meaning, bonds, a common spirit, purpose, and a space for exchanging ideas and solutions. Beyond that, Cooper describes gardens as an epiphany of man's relationship to the mystery of existence. Here, the metaphysics of gardens is a mirror to the relationship between a person and a community, in the sense that belonging to a community of spirit and being is a spiritual path that completes the experience of being-there (dasein) individually and collectively.

While the experience of being is a continuum that is comprehended through epiphanies, becoming is both a parallel process to the first, and a never-ending one always open for evolvement…

A garden is to a community what a lab is to a classroom. A garden is an ongoing enterprise, a commitment to maintaining, enhancing, and transforming. It reflects the becoming of the community — a horizon of existence — its potential and possible futures in transforming minds and practices.

5. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1962.

For an artist collective, the garden can be a space where ideas, projects, and aspirations are cultivated, even virtually. But this takes pause and questioning. Do we share a strong belief? Do we have common principles? Do we share aspirations? A spirit? A way of being? Where are our signs and miracles? Is our garden flourishing or is it a cynical façade? What is our public life? What is our practice, or our inspiration to act?

Utopia or Eutopia?

In the 19th century, America witnessed what was called The Utopian Communities Movement: a series of social experiments aimed at creating ideal societies based on various philosophical, religious and communal principles: Brook Farm, the Oneida community, and New Harmony are some notable examples. Sharing resources, collective living, idealism, and the quest for social justice shaped these “utopias”.

In the Gifted Mothers' answers, they dreamed about propagation (nurseries), expansion and experimentation (extended eco-farms), and an almost immortal and a never-to-be separated community, an immortal garden.

Communities can’t be envisioned without a form of utopian thinking at their core, a radical political vision and programme at their heart. A readiness to resist and negotiate with the powers in place to find one’s space — where the collective can participate in decision-making and in the life of the Polis.

This is the real and original description of More’s utopia — a non-place, a non-existing society — while Eutopia, described by the same author, is a "good place".

So why do we, as artists and practitioners, need to be part of a community or a collective? Why do some collectives fail while others last? What is a community? Is there a need to redefine it in our hyper-productive oriented times?

The construction of ‘true community’ versus the ‘illusory community’ is the value objective of Marxism.

The true community is the union of free people. In an effort to be pragmatic while maintaining these ideals, perhaps we can define contemporary collectives and communities as Eutopias — good places for reflection and action, balancing idealism and pragmatism as a middle ground.

Political and utopian thought cannot be separated. A true community of spirit is a Eutopian aspiration to communion with nature and society, while actively participating in the political life of the Polis. If Utopian thought represents the ideals that collectives should aspire to, the community itself becomes the Eutopia — a space for reflection and action, becoming through its members' efforts this garden, this 'good place'.

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Notes

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Pas pète foi: Readings and conversation on friendship, labour, failure, faith... and sitting with the mess of it all. Lorén Elhili with Nouha Ben Yebdri, Alia Belgsir, Francesca Masoero, Rim Mejdi, and Sarah Mounia Kachiri

Free notes on communities and gardens. Rim Mejdi

Booklet 2 in the series **Carrots die everywhere, Publishing practices from the Shadow of the Moon**

Commissioned and conceived as part of the **Shadow of the Moon** project, with Francesca Masoero, Molemo Moiloa, Pelonomi Moiloa, Sarah Mounia Kachiri, Jeanne van Heeswijk

Coordination by Sarah Mounia Kachiri

Design by wwwork, Robyn Cook

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